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## **Pier-safety legislation one step closer to becoming law after winning passage in House committee**

**LANSING** — The mother of a Grand Haven youth who died in a pier-related drowning accident testified Wednesday before a state House committee about the need for tougher punishments for stealing life preservers.

Vicki Cech, who lost her son, Andy Fox, in 2003, told House Judiciary Committee members about her son's story and how others' lives are jeopardized because of the missing safety equipment. Cech's son was swept away by a rip current and no life preserver was nearby for his friends to throw to him. After hearing her testimony, the committee approved two bills that strengthen penalties for such thefts.

The legislation, Senate Bills 816 and 817, are sponsored by Sens. Wayne Kuipers, R-Holland, and Jud Gilbert, R-Algonac. Kuipers and Gilbert each represent districts that border one of the Great Lakes.

The bills, which already have passed the Senate, would make it a misdemeanor for anyone who tampers with or steals a marine-safety device maintained by the state or a local government. If a person dies or becomes permanently disabled because the device was unavailable or unusable, the offender can be found guilty of a felony.

"Michigan's shores and piers should be as safe as possible," Kuipers said. "While taking a life ring from a pier may seem like a harmless prank, in reality it puts everyone who uses the pier at risk."

Besides pushing for tougher laws, Cech and other members of the Great Lakes Beach and Pier Safety Task Force have created informational material to educate people how to use piers safely and about the dangers of rip currents. The group's Web site is located at [www.respectthepower.org](http://www.respectthepower.org).

"I can't let anyone go through this nightmare if I can help it," Cech said.

The bills now will be considered by the full House of Representatives.

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